

Has Kennedy Shown Greatness? Lippmann Answers

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Recently Walter Lippmann, America's most distinguished analyst of public affairs, was interviewed on television by Howard K. Smith of the Columbia Broadcasting System. The interview was based on considerable measure on first-hand information Lippmann had obtained in earlier private conversations with Premier Khrushchev, President De Gaulle, Prime Minister Macmillan and President Kennedy. The Herald here presents, in only slightly abbreviated form, the interview.

SMITH: In a column about a year ago, you said, in regard to the qualities a good President should have, the first thing is his ability to see through to what is permanent and enduring. This second sight is the quality of great leaders. Do you think that Kennedy has that second sight?

LIPPMANN: I think he is capable of having it. But I think it is too early to say that he has or hasn't got it.

WHAT HAS HE DEMONSTRATED?

SMITH: Well, what has President Kennedy demonstrated so far?

LIPPMANN: What he has done in the four or five months is, first, to carry on in all its essentials the Eisenhower economic philosophy and the Eisenhower international commitments, while, by explaining to the country those that can be changed. It's like the Eisenhower Administration thirty years younger. Well, that's the way he started, but that isn't the way he's going to go. I think that in the next year, he will make

great decision, whether he can afford to balance the budget in the Eisenhower sense and allow the economy to remain at a fairly quiet level; or whether he wants to give it a real push upward. That's going to be decided in the coming months. And a weakness of Kennedy is that he never explained these things to the American people.

HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THIS?

SMITH: Now, Mr. Nixon has said that, Senator Fulbright has said that, and you have said that. Yet (Kennedy has) spoken more than Mr. Eisenhower did.

LIPPMANN: I know, but he hasn't explained. He has not explained what his economic challenge is, and what it is going to require in the way of much stronger measures. He never explained why. If he wants to do all these things such as fight the cold war and win it, to really outdo the Communists — it's got to be done at full blast of the American economy, with a production of fifty billions more than we produced this year. He needs money to do that. That's never been explained to our people, so they have no sense of urgency. And he has never explained to them the very unpleasant fact which he didn't create — it's not his fault — that we have moral commitments and legal commitments, mainly around the rim of Asia, which were built up before he took office and when we were the supreme military power in the world. And coming down from being supreme to being only equal is an awful wrench for every country, and it makes people frustrated and angry.

SMITH: Well, can you understand why he has not communicated?

LIPPMANN: I put it in this: that he is a very quick and intelligent man, himself — reads very fast, understands very fast, and it leaves him to explain things. He likes to make decisions and announce them, but he doesn't explain them.

CAN WE AGREE WITH RUSSIA?

SMITH: Is it possible that a free, loose-jointed, easy-going society like the American democracy can compete with a tightly concentrated, tightly controlled, secret dictatorship like that of the Soviet Union and Red China?

LIPPMANN: Well, that's the dream of our age. That's the question, and that is why many of us think that the Kennedy Administration has to get going and moving rapidly, or we won't be able to do it. I wouldn't like, for a moment, to underestimate how formidable this competition is and this threat. What we're going to have to do is going to take a lot of money, and it's going to take a very strong government.

HAS KENNEDY BOOSTED PRESTIGE?

SMITH: Well, if Mr. Kennedy set himself one main goal in the election campaign, it was to resurrect America's fallen prestige. Do you think that in his legislative program he